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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: RESPONSE TO SPECIAL
REPRESENTATIVE CHRISTOPOULOS

¶1. Post is authorized to make the following statement at the January 22, 2009, meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna:

Begin Text:

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

The United States welcomes Special Representative Christopoulos to the Permanent Council. We appreciate the Greek Chairmanship's ongoing efforts to restore stability now, to protect Georgia's territorial integrity in the future, and to find a way to maintain an OSCE presence there.

We believe the OSCE plays a critical role in Georgia, and fills a unique niche that would make it difficult to replace. Its recent work to help restore gas deliveries to Tskhinvali is just one example of the OSCE's valuable contributions, which demonstrates its ability to produce results. Its monitoring officers provide information on the situation on the ground, with special emphasis on security around the South Ossetian region of Georgia, helping to deter destabilizing actions and promote dialogue. Its staff offer direct assistance in democracy, human rights, rule of law, and economic development activities, and represent the collective wisdom of all 56 participating States in implementing fundamental OSCE commitments. The OSCE's extensive experience and contacts allow it not only to offer insight on the immediate and long-term impact of the conflict, but also to provide input in the search for lasting reconciliation and comprehensive solutions.

If the OSCE no longer had a presence in Georgia, its vital role as mediator, monitor, project implementer, and policy advisor would be sorely missed. Its absence would remove an important intermediary voice, possibly increasing the likelihood of direct confrontation in a still-tense atmosphere, and would limit our ability to build confidence and resolve what remains an ongoing conflict.

We remain concerned about repeated incidents of violence in the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia, which underscore the need for an OSCE monitoring presence with uninhibited access throughout Georgia. As recently as January 16, a Georgian policeman was shot and killed in the Georgian-administered village of Knolevi, gunned down from South Ossetian territory under Russian control. At least 10 other Georgian policemen have been killed, and many others wounded, subsequent to the August conflict, and kidnappings, banditry, ethnic cleansing, and attacks on Georgian officials and property continue. Credible reports suggest some of these attacks have involved rocket-propelled grenades and highly specialized sniper equipment) an alarming indication of the potential for further violence. These actions are unacceptable. We call on Russia to use its strong military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, despite this violation of the August 12 and September 8 cease fire agreements, to help to prevent these destabilizing actions.

In this environment, a continued OSCE presence in Georgia is

especially important, not only to help deter violence, promote human rights and encourage dialogue and reconciliation, but also to monitor the implementation of the August 12 and September 8 agreements brokered by French President Sarkozy. We continue to urge Russia to implement fully its commitments under these agreements, which clearly state that Russian forces are to withdraw to pre-conflict positions. In particular, Russia continues to maintain forces near the town of Perevi, in the Akhalgori region, and in the Upper Kodori Valley, areas that were never controlled by Russia or the separatists prior to the August war. We note that Russia reiterated these commitments to withdraw even after its destabilizing decision to recognize the Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent.

We are prepared to support the basic approach advanced in the Greek package, and look forward to receiving more details of the three elements of the proposal.

We stand ready to work with the Chairmanship on a means to ensure a continued OSCE presence in Georgia. The United States will continue to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and will help in all ways to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Thank you, Madame Chairwoman.
CLINTON